



Tilting at Windmills

BY CHARLES PETERS

*Gambling Addicts • Volunteer Slavery • The Pentagon as Turkey Farm
Clinton's Real Enemies • The Rise of the Yachting Class*

KEN STARR HAS A RIVAL IN Orange County, California. It seems that the special prosecutor hired by the county to clean up corruption has run up a bill of \$37,500 with the following results, according to Esther Schrader of the *Los Angeles Times*: "There was the failure to itemize a Visa bill on one campaign contribution report, the missing employer addresses on another and a third report filed three days late."

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"HOSPITAL RESIDENT PHYSICIANS should not work more than 80 hours a week." That's what the law says in New York. It was passed after there was reason to believe that overworked interns and residents had contributed to the death of 18-year-old Libby Zion. At the time the "reform" struck me as absurdly modest. Few of us can work nearly that long without becoming glassy-eyed.

But even that modest reform has been flouted. "Hospitals in New York City often rely on exhausted and poorly supervised medical residents," writes Esther Fein of *The New York Times*. "Residents say they worry about making mistakes because they routinely work more than the legal maximum of 80 hours a week and often have no senior doctors monitoring their diagnoses and treatments." One second-year resident told Fein, "The senior doctors are often just not here and there's a real taboo about calling them at home when there's a problem in the middle of the night."

The *Monthly* has a solution to this one. Require the senior doc-

tors, as a condition to their use of a hospital, to agree to serve a few nights a year not just to advise residents but to replace enough of them for long enough to give residents and interns a sane work schedule without the long stretches of sleeplessness that are now so common.

When I first floated the idea, a young doctor told me that it might work except that some of the senior doctors were incompetent and out of date in their medical knowledge. But why permit such doctors to practice at all?

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DID YOU KNOW that nannies are in such great demand that they are now earning \$35,000 a year, and, according to Knight-Ridder's Michelle Quinn, "more if they do some house chores"? It seems possible that that the short supply might not be unrelated to the scorn extreme feminists have expressed for the nurturing professions. Now that they're desperate for someone to care for little Jennifer and Jason, I'll bet many of them have changed their tune.

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SPEAKING OF TUNES, THAT deafening music that assails you in many restaurants is not a matter of chance. According to the Wall Street Journal's Andrea Peterson the ear-splitting sound is designed to keep out "the frumpy over-30 crowd" and to

make diners eat faster so there will be more table turnover.

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REMEMBER HOW OUTRAGED THE Republicans were because the Clinton administration had given an Arlington burial to a former ambassador and campaign contributor who had falsely claimed wartime service? Well, according to *The Hill*, Republican Sen. Ted Stevens also "sought a waiver to have a former ambassador buried in Arlington National Cemetery who had falsely claimed a military record, but had raised more than \$21 million for the Republican Party." At least Clinton's man, Larry Lawrence, was an ambassador to a real country. Stevens's nominee, Daniel J.

Terra, was named by the Reagan administration to be "ambassador at large for cultural affairs" after he raised the \$21 million for Reagan's 1980 campaign.

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OKAY SO WHAT DO WE think about the Lewinsky hullabaloo? My friend Molly Ivins says "I don't care who he's screwing, as long as it's not the public." I agree. I am troubled, however, by the way he seems to be hitting on women who work for him, although I suspect that this has less to do with his power over them than with the fact that they happen to be around. He has abused his employees in more serious ways. Consider the case of Vince Foster. As I

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wrote in this column in 1993, the president and his wife had no right to have Foster work, while serving as a government employee in the White House, on their private legal business. And Clinton has made some truly miserable appointments and doesn't pay nearly enough attention to what's going on down below in the federal government. He's made the bureaucracy a lot leaner, but not a lot better. His central passion, next to getting laid (or the alternative he is said to deem more permissible) is getting re-elected. Still, his policy choices have been good enough that I'm convinced history will rank him in the upper half of American presidents.

It would be folly to impeach him for sexual behavior or lying about it or trying to get others to lie about it. These actions may diminish our respect for him as a person, but as Molly says, they don't screw the American people.

PEOPLE IN CARS HIT BY ONE OF those sport-utility vehicles are four times more likely to die than the people in the sport utes. Fortunately, although they are more likely to kill other motorists, the damage they do is limited by the fact that 3 out of 5 of the sport utility owners are 40 to 65 years old, which is the safest group of drivers. This is because the typical sale price for these vehicles is close to \$30,000. But what, asks Keith Bradsher of *The New York Times*, is going to happen when the sport utes are used and cheap enough to be bought by drunks and reckless adolescents? Not only will the behemoths be in the hands of the people most likely to do harm with them but their brakes and other safety devices will have deteriorated.

IF YOU WANT SOMETHING ELSE to worry about, ponder the results of a survey conducted by UCLA's Higher Education Research Institute. Only 26.7 percent of today's

college freshmen believe that "keeping up to date with political affairs" is an important life goal compared to 57.8 percent in 1966. Interest in programs to clean up the environment is down from 33.6 percent just five years ago to 19.4 percent today. Commitment to promoting racial understanding fell from 42 percent to 31.8 percent in the same period.

EVEN IF YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF enlightened in matters of the heart, you may pause at the title of a lecture given at a conference on women's sexuality at the New Paltz campus of the State University of New York: "Safe, Sane and Consensual S&M: An Alternative Way of Loving."

ONE OF THE SUREST CAREER steps for a military officer aspiring to high rank is to become an aide to a general. One third of the Army's 300 generals were aides at one point in their career. Yet *The Washington Post's* Dana Priest reports: "In choosing aides de camp, Army leaders nearly always exclude female officers."

SIMILAR BAD NEWS COMES FROM the United States Senate, where of the 14 nominees for federal judgeships who have waited longest to be confirmed, 12 are women or minorities.

I'VE GENERALLY ADMIRED Walter Isaacson's editing of *Time*, which has won two Monthly Journalism Awards in the past year. But I was distinctly unimpressed by the mindless libertarianism of an attack on requiring volunteer service from high school students, which *Time* characterized as "slavery" in a December issue. So I was delighted by a letter to the editor from a teacher named Milton Rouse that straightened out the libertarians at *Time*: "Requiring volunteer work is no more slavery than requiring that students do homework or run

around a track during gym."

BACK TO THOSE SPORT UTILITY vehicles, the latest development is a *stretch* version. Developed by the Excalibur Limousine Service in Brooklyn, it is 34 feet long, carries 18 passengers, and according to James Barron of *The New York Times*, "gets about 5 miles to the gallon."

A MAJOR TENET OF this magazine — both in its journalism, which seeks to find solutions, and in its political philosophy, neoliberalism, which tries to acknowledge liberal failures as it continues to seek to achieve liberal goals — is that we have to face facts that don't fit our case.

As evidence mounts on the effects of the legalization of gambling, we have to admit that some of it casts doubt on a cause we support, the legalization of dope.

As gambling has been legalized in the United States, the number of gambling addicts has increased by half, rising from .84 percent of adults to 1.29, according to a study by Harvard Medical School. And according to another study by Dr. David Phillips of the University of California at San Diego, suicide rates in Las Vegas are four times the national average. The rate of visitor suicides in Atlantic City is double the national average. Americans are now spending 6 percent of the GNP on gambling, compared to the 8 percent they spend on groceries.

A major factor, I suspect, is that gambling casinos are permitted to advertise. This is the same mistake we made after liquor was re-legalized when Prohibition was repealed in 1933. Advertising depicted drinking as glamorous. And of course we allowed advertising from the beginning to lure young people into smoking. This is why I have said that I would never support dope legalization that is not accompanied by a ban on advertising.

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ONE OF WASHINGTON'S BEST-kept secrets is the generosity of federal pensions, which are usually considerably better than those in private business. Four congressmen planning to retire at the end of this session will receive pensions that start between \$96,452 and \$98,694. But the starting figure doesn't tell half the story. Take former Congressman Hastings Keith, whose civil service pension began at \$1560 a month in 1973. He now gets \$6,682 a month, thanks to the multiplying effect of annual cost-of-living adjustments. Keith also collects three other pensions from the federal government: \$1,546 a month for his military service, \$1324 for social security and \$871 a month in widower's annuity for his wife's service in the CIA. His total federal pension income in 1998 will be \$125,976. Incidentally his civil service pension includes credit for his year in the military even though he also gets a military pension for that service.

Keith has led a lonely crusade against this pension insanity. As far as I know his only allies are this magazine and the National Taxpayers' Union. Too many Washingtonians have friends, neighbors, or relatives in on the goodies to want to blow the whistle.

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BY THE WAY, SPEAKING OF GENEROUS government pensions, did you notice the photograph in *The New York Times* of Betty Currie's husband Robert, identified as a retired federal employee? His car is in the background. It is a late-model Mercedes.

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THE WORST TAX IS OUR NAME for the social security payroll tax. We call it that because it weighs

heaviest on working people with modest incomes and is not paid on income over \$65,000.

This year there are two proposals for reform before the Congress, one by a Democrat, Ted Kennedy, another by a Republican, John Ashcroft. Kennedy wants to lower the present rate of 6.2 percent to 5.3 and make up for the lost revenue by having the tax apply to income over \$65,000. Ashcroft would allow the tax to be deducted from income tax payments. The catch to this proposal is that it doesn't offer a way to replace the lost income. But it's good to have a Republican who at least sees that something must be done about the payroll tax. Let's hope enough of his colleagues wake up to the need to enact legislation that is effective in bringing relief to workers and that they are, in contrast to Ashcroft, realistic

enough to find other revenue to replace what is lost. My own solution is a larger reduction than Kennedy proposes for income under \$65,000 that would be financed by a larger increase on incomes over \$65,000.

Given the way the rich are getting richer, we might even make the break point higher. Do you have any idea how well the top fifth of Americans are doing these days? In New York, their average income is \$132,390. In Maryland, it's \$147,971. In Connecticut, it's \$149,594. Even in states like Iowa, Wisconsin, Kansas, and Utah, the figure is more than \$100,000.

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MAYBE WE COULD ASK THE FORTUNATE fifth to sacrifice a few feet off the length of their yachts. *The New York Times* reports that sales of sailboats over 35 feet long rose 40 percent last year. The number of registered recreational boats has more than doubled in the last two

decades. There were 12.1 million in 1996 and, as the *Times* reports, the boat yards have really been humming since then.

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AS THEY WATCH THE NEW RUSSIAN business elite drive around Moscow in their Mercedes 600s flashing special passes that give them immunity from the police, the average Russian is saying, writes Christina Freeland of the *Financial Times*, "Everything Marx told us about communism was false but everything he told us about capitalism was true."

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REMEMBER "WORKFARE"? THAT was the requirement in the welfare reform law that people on relief who can't find regular jobs must do community service work which the states were supposed to arrange by Oct. 22. But by the end of the year only three states were even trying to meet the requirement, according to David Whitman of *U.S. News*. Because getting people back into the habit of work is so important, this is bad news. It's also understandable. Such work is not easy to arrange. But it can be done. New York City has 18,000 welfare recipients who, writes Whitman, "are now working off their grants 20 hours a week picking up trash, cleaning public parks and streets, answering phones, and the like."

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HAVE YOU CONSIDERED WHAT the impeachment trial of Bill Clinton would be like? The setting is the august chamber of the United States Senate. Presiding is the Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court. And the 100 members of the United States Senate gravely attend to the evidence — evidence adduced by questions like "And what happened after he unzipped his zipper?"

This would be absurd to the point of insanity. Yet it is where the Starr investigation seems to be heading. There is likely to be evi-

dence of perjury and of subornation of perjury by the president. One part of our brain feels that he shouldn't be allowed to get away with it. Another says that impeachment would be overkill. A recent letter to the Washington Post said it would be better to let evidence remain "murky" so we won't have to decide whether to proceed with impeachment. Another suggests the Papuan term "mikita" should govern: "That which we know to be true but have agreed not to talk about."

I think the letter writers are very close to the right solution. I don't, however, agree that we can stop talking. Gossip is human. And I suspect the president deserves to be the butt of those late night jokes. But let's abandon the notion that there must be some kind of legal adjudication of the case of Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky.

As a nation we sensed that it would be overkill to impeach Ronald Reagan for Iran Contra, and we expressed that sense through the decision by Lee Hamilton and Warren Rudman, who headed the Congressional inquiry, not to pursue the issue of Reagan's guilt, even though his offenses were not personal but matters of state. I think it was a wise decision. A similar decision would be even wiser now.

As a realistic matter, I think the best chance of avoiding impeachment lies in the Republicans realizing that they don't want to give Gore a head start on 2000 by putting him in the White House now.

So I suspect the greatest danger to Bill Clinton will come not from the Congress but from Ken Starr, or to be more precise, from Starr's staff. Remember, last year Starr wanted to get out of this job and go to California and enjoy the pleasures of Pepperdine College and the Pacific Coast. But his staff rebelled. Having recruited them, how could he desert? He still has

his next job. They don't. They need their resumes to reek of success, not failure. They have to nail the president. This is what would worry me if I were in Bill Clinton's shoes.

SPEAKING OF WASHINGTON insanity, did you know that the office of the Senate Sergeant at Arms has a Director of Communications, Planning, and Policy? When a history of makework is written, it may well prove that its great institutional pioneers were the hangers-on in legislative appendages such as the office of the Sergeant at Arms and the office of the Doorkeeper.

TWA'S FLIGHT 800 CRASHED because a spark ignited the center wing fuel tank. Most of us know that much, yet few also know another factor in the explosion: the kind of fuel TWA was using. It is called "Jet A." It has a flash point of 86 degrees F at 13,800 feet, the altitude which Flight 800 had attained at the moment it exploded, *below* the estimated temperature of the vapors in the fuel tank. You will recall that these vapors had been heated by the air-conditioning units directly under the fuel tank, which had been running for three and a half hours due to delays before takeoff. The Navy uses another fuel, JP5, with a flash point that is higher than the temperature of Flight 800's fuel tank. But JP5 is not used by commercial air lines. Why? According to Don Phillips of *The Washington Post*, "JP5 now costs two cents a gallon more."

LINDA TRIPP MAKES \$88,000 A year in her public affairs job at the Pentagon. This may come as a surprise to those who have the impression that government employees are all underpaid. Some are — the failure to pay competitive salaries to accountants has been a factor in the decline of the

IRS — but many more, especially in the middle and upper-middle grades, are adequately or even generously compensated.

One reason for this is inflated performance ratings. Tripp has had several salary raises since she went to the Pentagon two years ago. "Favorable job evaluations," according to Amy Goldstein and Rene Sanchez of *The Washington Post*, "helped boost her salary." She's not alone: Three-quarters of the Pentagon's 114 other public affairs employees are also rated "outstanding."

At the White House she was considered "constantly disagreeable, someone who tried to act like a big gatekeeper, a player in everything, when she in fact was really only a secretary."

Why then did the White House arrange to have her hired at the Pentagon? Because of her "sour attitude," she was viewed as "something of a dangerous commodity."

Is it right to ship someone who is "constantly disagreeable" from one part of the joint to another? Obviously not — people in any part of the government should care about having it all work well — but it happens all the time. It's called "turkey farming." And it's usually done because it's easier than firing.

"One of the best ways to get a better job in government," one official told the *Post*, "is for people to really need you to move out of the job you have." ●

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A Brief History of Management Consultants

Who are these people and why are we paying them so much money?

BY GREGG EASTERBROOK

NEW ITEM: FRANKLIN COVEY, THE “life management” firm founded through Stephen R. Covey’s bestseller, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, announced that its 1997 revenues totaled \$433 million. The company has sold 12 million books, including *The Ten Natural Laws of Time and Life Management*. Franklin Covey products include the “Seven Habits of Highly Effective Families” audio tapes, a “One Day Getting to Synergy Workshop,” and a “Three Day Time Quest Management Workshop.” The company notes that “one in 3.5 people in the state of Michigan carry a Franklin Day Planner,” a device for keeping lists.

Each year, Franklin Covey holds seminars for 750,000 people from corporations, government agencies, and schools, and says it has “certified more than 14,000 in-house corporate facilitators.” Its client list boasts the Department of Energy, which has spent at least \$500,000 on Covey workshops; some 2,900 school districts; the federal departments of Defense, Interior, and Transportation; the U.S. Postal Service; corporations such as AT&T, Intel, and General Electric; and President Bill Clinton, who spent a day being privately tutored by Steven Covey during Thanksgiving week of 1994. Covey, once the subject of a PBS documentary, asserts that he has discovered “the universal value system of all mankind.” His company is traded on the New York Stock Exchange under the symbol FC.

SCENE: Camp David, Thanksgiving week of 1994. A light snow falls on the Maryland mountains. President William Jefferson Clinton sits in his study, where an intern is assisting him. Linda Tripp, a trusted aide, shows in Steven R. Covey.

CLINTON: Thank you for coming. I would have liked to go out to the life-management resort facility your company runs in Sundance, Utah. I hear that government agencies and major corporations spend tens of millions of dollars per year to send people to your resort, where the food and the snow bunnies are four-star. I mean, to read “wisdom literature,” like your brochure says.

COVEY: Mr. President, are you proactive? Do you synergize?

CLINTON: You see, the Republicans have just taken over the House, and I need advice on —

COVEY: Mr. President, do you make lists? Do you focus on your goals?

CLINTON: Well, doesn’t everybody —

COVEY: Lists! Make proactive lists! Make lists *before* you plan to do something, not afterward! Then keep the lists in your pocket in a Franklin Day Planner, as my publicists say with a perfectly straight face that one person in 3.5 in Michigan does! Then, exactly seven times a day, take out your list and look at it! Do you mind if I stand on your desk?

GREGG EASTERBROOK is a contributing editor of *The Washington Monthly*, *the Atlantic Monthly*, and *U.S. News & World Report*.